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Abstract
This paper summarizes recent evidence on the trends in contingency in higher education. Contingent faculty employment, defined as the sum of full-time non-tenure track faculty employment and part-time faculty employment, increased both absolutely and relative to all faculty positions between 2002 and 2015, despite a modest downturn after 2011. The long-term growth of contingency since 2002 has primarily occurred in doctoral degree universities. The short-term decline in contingency since 2011 has primarily occurred in public associates' degree colleges and in private for-profit colleges. This short-term decline is due to the contraction of the for-profit sector combined with a one-time drop in public associates' degree colleges. The explanation of the long-term growth of contingency as an inevitable response to financial exigency is rejected. Contingency has increased due to the priorities of higher education administrators, not state budget cuts or other drops in revenue.

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Contingency has reached astonishingly high levels across higher education. Faculty members off the tenure-track teach most undergraduate classes at most colleges and universities. The tenure system and the protections it provides for academic freedom have been significantly weakened. These trends are one of the major forces

reshaping higher education,[1] and perhaps the most fundamental. Yet it can be difficult to document and interpret faculty employment trends, and to explain their causes.

This paper reports on recent research on trends in contingency from 2002 to 2015. It disaggregates faculty employment by college and university type. It shows that contingency has reached very high levels across all of higher education. It grew significantly from 2002 to 2015 despite a downturn that began in 2011. Its growth since 2002 has primarily taken place in doctoral degree universities. Its decline since 2011 has occurred primarily in public associates' degree colleges and in private for-profit colleges, following the pattern of student enrollments. It demonstrates that the long-term growth in contingency cannot be explained by state budget cuts or other revenue problems. Instead, it is driven by the priorities and choices of college and university administrators.

Trends in Contingency

The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) [2] published by the National Center for Education Statistics is the most comprehensive source of data on faculty employment in the United States, covering all degree-granting colleges and universities as well as many other post-secondary institutions that award certificates in fields such as cosmetology or radiology. IPEDS data has been used to provide snapshots of faculty employment by tenure status in particular years. For example, the American Association of University Professors published a seminal report in 2006 (Curtis and Jacobe) showing that contingent faculty employment increased from 43% of all faculty employment in 1975 to 63% in 2005. Similarly, the Center for the Study of Academic Labor has started an annual series of reports using IPEDS data on faculty and graduate student employment in colleges and universities across the United States. The most recent report (Shulman) shows that contingent faculty employment increased to 65% of all faculty employment by 2014. These figures suggest that the increase in contingency has continued in recent years but at a slower pace. It may have reached a plateau with about two-thirds of faculty employment off the tenure track.

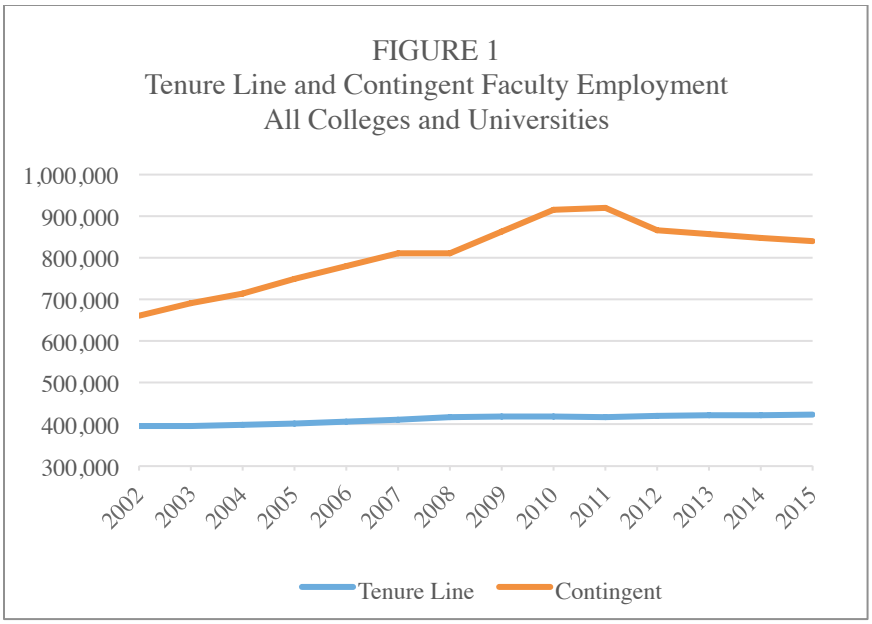
This paper is meant to add detail to these snapshot comparisons by providing consistent measures of contingency with annual IPEDS data since 2002. Prior to that year, IPEDS data on faculty employment varies in its definitions and consistency. The data since 2002 can be broken down by faculty characteristics such as academic rank, tenure status, and full-time/part-time, and institutional characteristics such as institutional type (defined in terms of highest degree granted) and sector (public, private non-profit, and private for-profit). Each year's sample is limited to non-medical faculty employment in degree-granting colleges

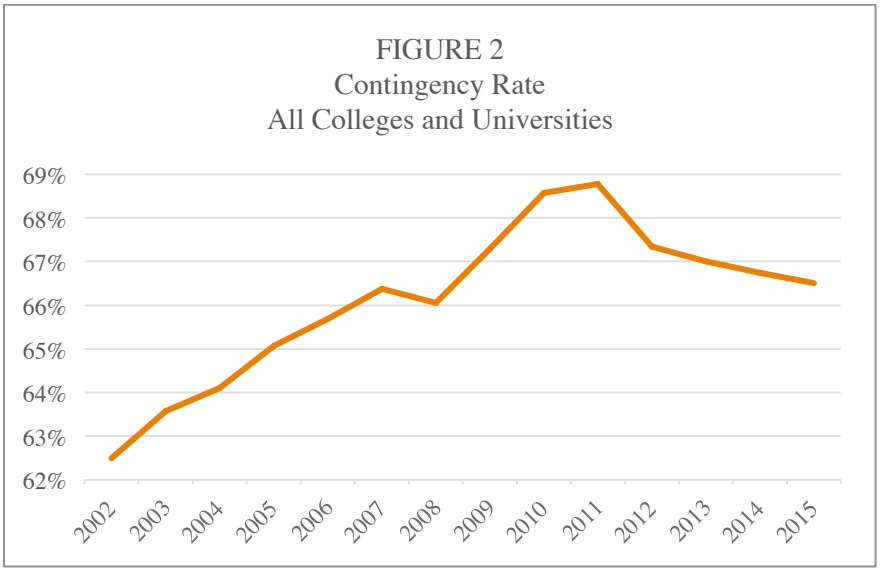
and universities.[3] Contingent faculty employment is defined as the sum of full-time non-tenure-track faculty employment and part-time faculty employment, almost all of which is off the tenure- track. Contingent faculty positions vary widely with respect to responsibilities (teaching, research and/or administration), compensation, and work conditions. Full-time non-tenure-track positions are usually better-paid and more secure than part-time positions; however, like part-time positions, they lack tenure and the protections it provides for academic freedom. Consequently, the two are combined for an overall measure of contingency in academic labor markets.

Figure 1 shows the trend in contingent and tenure-line (tenured plus tenure-track) faculty employment across all colleges and universities from 2002 to 2015. Over the entire period, the number of tenure-line positions rose by 6.6% while the number of contingent positions rose by 26.1%. The more rapid increase in contingent positions is notable since it starts out on a much larger base than tenure-line positions; however, the increase has not been steady. The number of contingent positions peaked in 2011 and fell slowly thereafter. While it is impossible to know if the decline over these four years will continue, it suggests that contingency may have reached its feasible maximum.

Figure 2 shows the ratio of contingent faculty employment to total faculty employment, or what I will call the "contingency rate." This ratio is typically used as a summary measure of the extent of contingency.[4] The contingency rate rose significantly from 62.5% in 2002 to 68.8% in 2011, and then fell to 66.8% by 2015. Thus it reveals two trends: a substantial increase in contingency from 2002 to 2015, extending the long-term increase from the 1970s, and a more modest short-term decline since 2011.

A comparison of Figures 1 and 2 shows that the long-term and short-term trends in the contingency rate have been almost entirely driven by changes in contingent faculty employment (as opposed to changes in tenure-line faculty employment). The remainder of this paper will document and explain these trends.

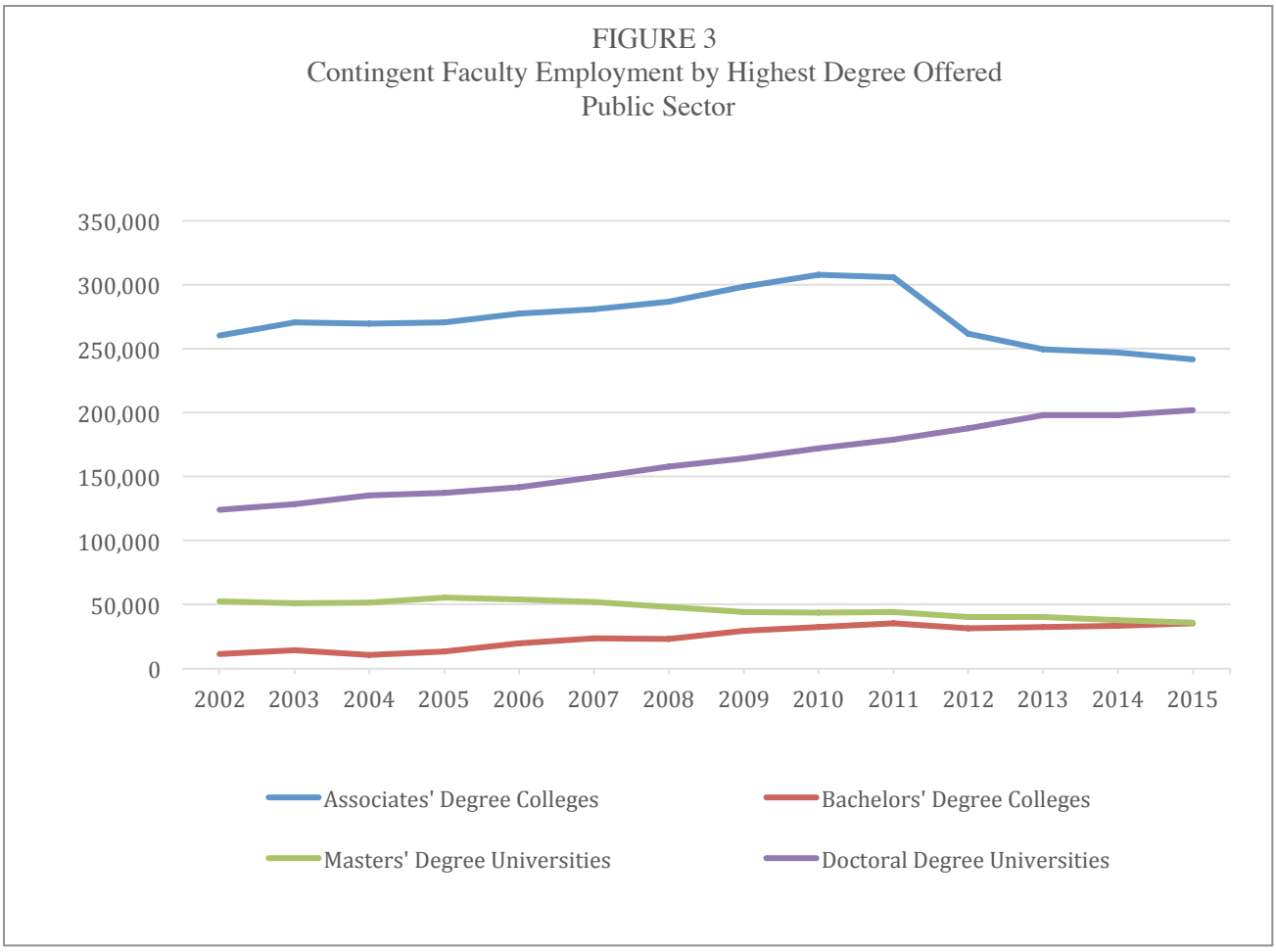




Disaggregating Contingency

The IPEDS data make it possible to show the trends in contingent faculty employment by institutional type (defined in terms of highest degree offered – doctoral, masters, bachelors or associates degrees) and sector (public, private non-profit, and private for-profit). These breakdowns, shown below in Figures 3, 4 and 5, can provide more insights into the trends in contingency that we seek to explain.

FIGURE 3
Contingent Faculty Employment by Highest Degree Offered
Public Sector



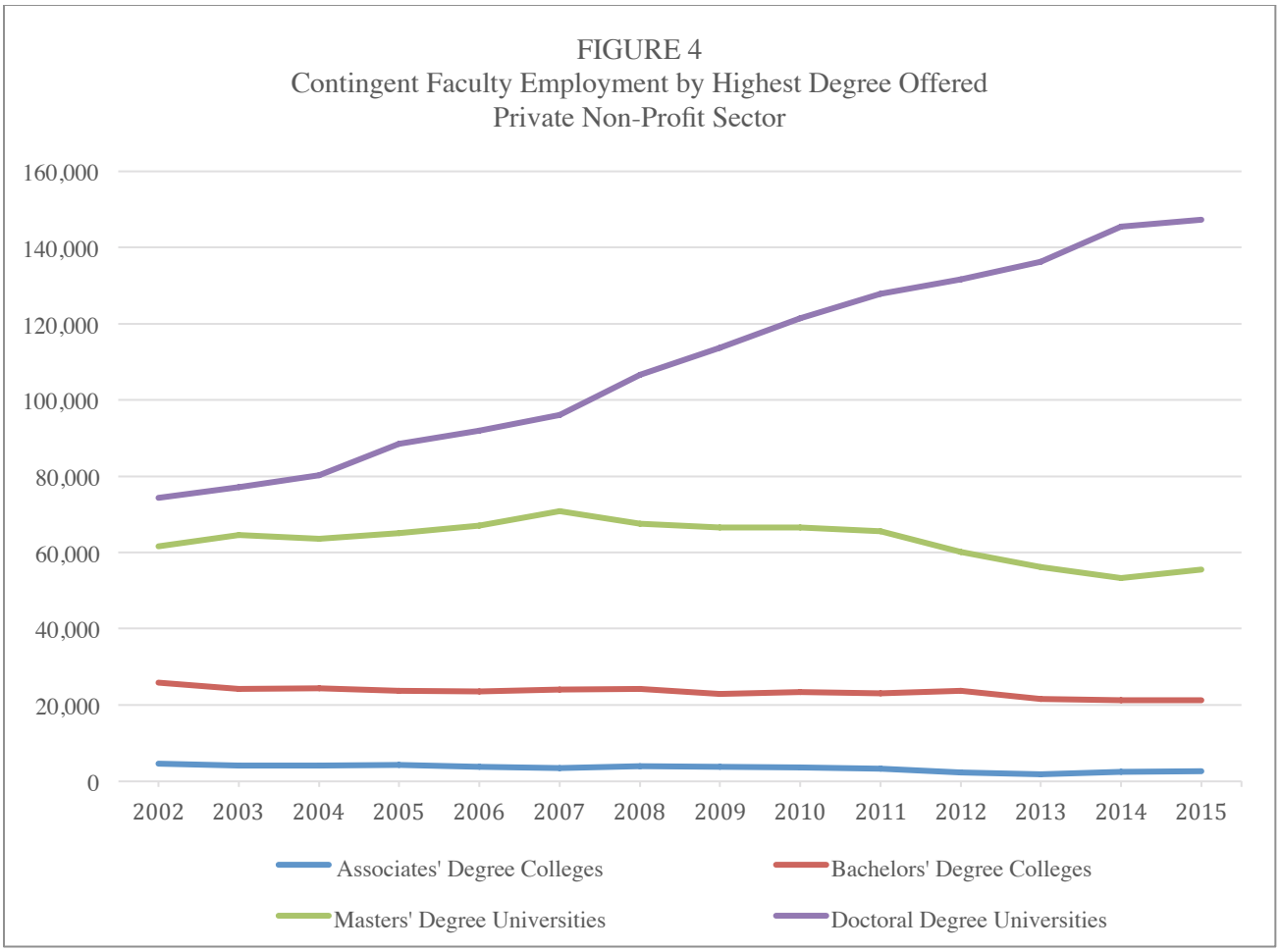
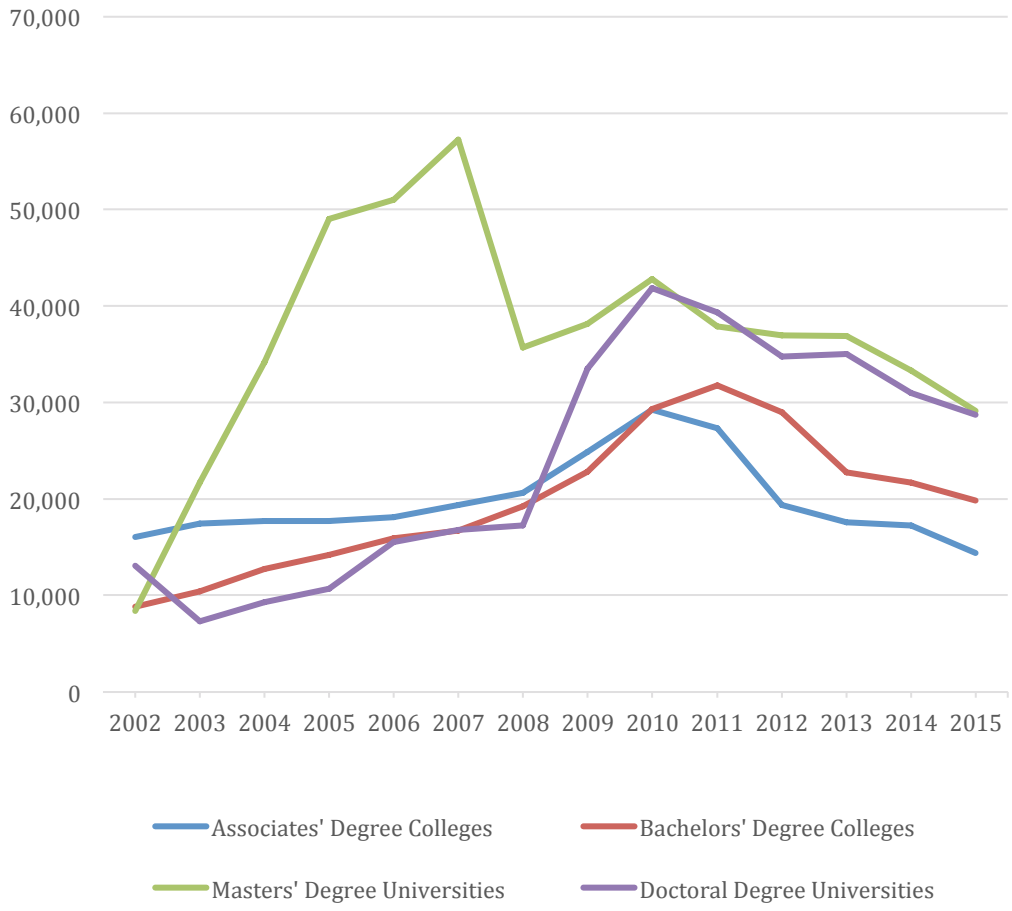


FIGURE 4
Contingent Faculty Employment by Highest Degree Offered
Private Non-Profit Sector
160,000
140,000
120,000
100,000
80,000
60,000
40,000
20,000
0
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
2013
2014
2015
Associates' Degree Colleges
Bachelors' Degree Colleges
Masters' Degree Universities
Doctoral Degree Universities

FIGURE 5
Contingent Faculty Employment by Highest Degree Offered
Private For-Profit Sector



Figures 3, 4, and 5 show considerable differences in the trends in contingent faculty employment when broken down by institutional type and sector. These breakdowns can help explain the long-term and short-term trends in contingent faculty employment.

First, the long-term growth in contingent faculty employment since 2002 has been driven primarily by doctoral degree universities in the public and private non-profit sectors. Contingent faculty employment grew much more slowly or declined at other colleges and universities in these two sectors. Contingent faculty employment also grew in the

private for-profit sector from 2002 to 2015 except in associates' degree colleges, but by much smaller numbers (note the differences in scale on the vertical axes when comparing Figures 3, 4 and 5). Contingent faculty employment at public doctoral degree universities will soon surpass its level at public associates' degree colleges if these trends continue. Contingent faculty employment at private non-profit doctoral degree universities has always been higher than its level at associates' degree colleges in the same sector. In terms of both levels and trends, doctoral degree universities now dominate the landscape for contingent faculty employment.

Second, the short-term decline in contingent faculty employment since 2011 is due to a one-time drop from 2011 to 2012 at public associates' degree colleges combined with an across-the-board contraction of the for-profit sector since 2010. Because contingent faculty employment has stabilized at public associates' degree colleges since 2012, and because it continues to rise at public and private non-profit doctoral degree universities, the drop in the aggregate contingency rate since 2011 may be coming to an end.

These trends in contingent faculty employment mirror the corresponding trends in student enrollments. Since 2002, only public and private non-profit four-year colleges and universities have shown consistent enrollment growth. Student enrollment at private for-profit four-year colleges and universities as well as student enrollments at all two-year colleges have been falling since 2011 (NCES, Table 303.25). Consequently, contingent faculty employment has grown at four-year institutions and declined in two-year institutions.

These observations begin to address the questions posed in the previous section. The short-run decline in contingency since 2011 is driven by a fall in the demand for academic labor as student enrollments declined in associates' degree and for-profit colleges. This is only to be expected since these institutions depend almost entirely on contingent faculty for their academic labor force. In contrast, the long-run increase on contingent faculty employment since 2002 is primarily a doctoral university phenomenon.[5] These universities see expanding enrollments and a much stronger and more diverse financial base. They are non-profit educational institutions that should be, and that claim to be, devoted to the goal of student success. Yet excessive contingency weakens academic freedom and student-faculty relationships, making it more difficult for students to succeed in earning their degrees (Ehrenberg and Zhang; Bettinger and Long). As student enrollments have grown at these institutions, why have they chosen to hire additional contingent faculty rather than additional tenure-line faculty?

Explaining the Long-Run Increase in Contingency

The common story is that contingency has been forced upon unwilling colleges and universities by financial necessity. State budget cuts have decimated public higher education. At the same time, many private institutions are struggling to enroll enough students to fill their available seats. They have to cut back somewhere, the story goes, and since contingent faculty are much cheaper than tenure-line faculty, the shift toward contingency is inevitable, even if it is regrettable.

This story may be true at some colleges and universities, but in general it is false. Tuition revenues at public colleges and universities have risen by much more than state support has fallen. Private colleges and universities have also significantly increased tuition revenues, and even the richest have displayed the same inclination to substitute contingent position for tenure-line positions. The explanation for increased contingency in academic labor markets must lie elsewhere.

Let us begin with public four-year colleges and universities. As I have noted in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, total revenues at these institutions increased by one-third from 2007 to 2015, which includes the years of the worst state budget cuts, largely due to increases in tuition and fees. Colleges and universities are able to raise tuition and fees because they face an inelastic demand for their product: enrollments continued to rise despite increases in tuition and fees. The tuition increases may be excessive and a cause for legitimate concern, but since they more than offset state budget cuts, it shows that public four-year colleges and universities have not increased contingent faculty hiring due to revenue shortfalls. Something else must be driving this dramatic shift in the hiring practices of these institutions.

The same is true of private four-year colleges and universities. At these institutions, total revenues increased by almost 44% from 2007 to 2015. Harvard University, the wealthiest in the world, had 37.3% of its faculty off the tenure-track in 2014 according to the CSAL report, a higher fraction than many other less well-known and less well-endowed private universities, such as the University of Miami (32.5%), Mercer University (25.8%), and the University of Tulsa (25.2%). These observations suggest that the increase in contingency is being driven by factors other than sheer lack of money. If most colleges and universities have been able to increase their revenues, then the real question is not the amount of money at their disposal, but how they have chosen to spend it. Instructional expenditures add up to only about one-quarter of total expenditures at public four-year colleges and universities, and to only about one-third of total expenditures at private four-year colleges and universities (NCES: Tables 334.10 and 334.30). Contrary to common opinion (and perhaps also to common sense), higher education budgets are not mostly about higher education. Instructional expenditures have

grown more slowly than other expenditures, an unsurprising observation given the salary savings that the growth in contingency generates. In particular, administrative positions and salaries have grown more rapidly than faculty positions and salaries (Ginsberg 23-24; Vedder 44-45). Athletic subsidies have also increased markedly, especially due to football programs that are typically huge money losers (Wolverton, et al). Colleges and universities have also engaged in an expensive competition over dorms, student centers, recreational facilities, and other student amenities. The reason that colleges and universities have increasingly turned to contingent faculty to staff their undergraduate classes is not because they have to, but because they can. The central problem is college and university priorities, not state budget cuts or other financial constraints.

Of course, there are other reasons for the growth in contingency aside from spending priorities. For example, the availability of contingent faculty members to teach undergraduate classes frees up tenure-line faculty members for other more prestigious and remunerative responsibilities. In this sense, it could be concluded that tenure-line faculty members benefit from the spread of contingency. Contingency also undermines shared governance and serves as a "divide-and-conquer" strategy for administrators. Contingency provides more flexibility for department chairs and other administrators who cannot fire or move around tenure-line faculty members as student demands for particular courses change. Contingent faculty members make it possible for a wider range of courses to be offered, and for faculty members with "real world" experience rather than traditional credentials to be hired to teach particular classes. It is also notable that the spread of contingency has coincided with the growth of female and minority Ph.D.s since the 1970.

As the professoriate has become less exclusively white and male, contingency has driven down faculty salaries and employment opportunities.[6] It seems clear that the spread of contingency is an administrative strategy to reduce instructional costs and to use those resources for other priorities: to free up tenure-line faculty from undergraduate teaching and to maximize administrative flexibility and control (Berry 4, 12-16; Ginsberg 163-4; Moser 79-82; Hacker and Dreifus 50-51).

Conclusions

Academic labor markets have undergone a sea change over the past few decades that is fundamentally altering the way that colleges and universities fulfill their educational mission. This worrisome change has occurred despite the fact that college and university revenues have been rising overall, even during the years of the worst state budget cuts. Some colleges and universities face genuine financial difficulties that force

them to economize in every possible way, but most have increased contingent faculty employment out of choice rather than necessity. The problem is not financial constraints, but the priorities and values of administrators who ultimately drive hiring decisions.

By all accounts, contingent faculty members do a remarkably good job teaching undergraduates given all the forces arrayed against them (Hacker and Dreifus 58). Nonetheless, the predominance of contingent faculty in undergraduate education is a legitimate and significant concern. Students taught by part-time faculty members display lower levels of achievement because their instructors are often denied basic resources and are not paid or treated like professionals (Baldwin and Wawrzynski). Contingent faculty members lack academic freedom, the bedrock of educational independence and quality. Their transient status prevents them from building long-term relationships with students or serving as their mentors. The low pay, job insecurity and the absence of professional development opportunities that define too many contingent faculty careers sends a chilling message to undergraduates contemplating graduate school. Their all-too-frequent invisibility in the departments that employ them freezes them out of academic communities and deprives these departments of their expertise and experience. They are hired on the cheap, as though education can be provided on the cheap, and as though that is the message about education that undergraduates should learn.

Colleges and universities can be many things, but first and foremost they are schools. Businesses are supposed to maximize profits. Schools are supposed to maximize learning. Of course, costs have to be kept within reasonable limits, but driving down instructional expenditures to rock bottom while paying football coaches or university presidents seven figure salaries is contrary to the mission and values of higher education. Like all workers, non-tenure-track faculty members deserve fair pay and fair treatment. Students deserve instructors who are treated with respect and whose academic freedom is protected. Expanding the tenure system may not be the only way of achieving these goals, but alternatives need to be explored[7] if higher education is to live up to its own ideals.

Notes

[1] Other forces reshaping higher education include the explosion of student debt, the rapid growth of online alternatives to traditional residential instruction, the drop in state support to public colleges and universities, the domination of administrative/corporate/donor interests, and the weakening of the liberal arts. See Hacker and Dreifus for a lively overview.

[2] IPEDS is run by the National Center for Education Statistics within the U.S. Department of Education, online at https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/home/usethedata.

[3] The AAUP report using 2005 IPEDS data further restricted the sample to regionally accredited institutions, excluding tribal colleges, special focus colleges and unclassified institutions. These restrictions were based on Carnegie data that the AAUP researchers merged with the IPEDS data. However, the Carnegie data set stopped including the accreditation variable in its 2015 version. Consequently, it is not used in this paper. The institutions that form the sample in this paper are limited to those that offer an associates' degree, a bachelors' degree, a masters' degree and/or a doctoral degree.

[4] The contingency rate shows the distribution of faculty positions in a simple and intuitive fashion. However, it does not accurately measure the distribution of faculty resources because it counts part-time faculty positions equally with full-time faculty positions. In order to get a better picture of how higher education is distributing the resources it puts into faculty positions, part-time positions must be adjusted to "full-time equivalents." The average part-time faculty member teaches two courses (calculated from CAW, Table 16), which would typically be defined as half-time employment. Part-time faculty employment thus is weighted by 0.5 to compute its full-time equivalent. A full-time equivalent contingency rate can then be calculated as full-time equivalent contingent positions relative to total full-time equivalent positions. Its pattern is similar to the simple contingency rate, though its level falls about ten percentage points below it. By 2015, 57.0% of full-time equivalent faculty positions were contingent.

[5] If anything, the figures presented in this paper understate contingency in doctoral degree universities because they do not account for graduate student employees. According to the CSAL report, graduate student employees whose primary responsibility was instruction outnumbered part-time faculty members whose primary responsibility was instruction. Graduate student employees who serve as teaching assistants should not be counted as faculty, but those who teach their own classes are performing the same instructional functions as faculty. The data on graduate student employees do not allow us to distinguish between those who work as teaching assistants and those who teach their own classes, but it is clear that including graduate student employees would increase the measures of contingency at doctoral universities. (The impact is much smaller at master's degree universities, and is negligible at bachelors' and associates' degree colleges.)

[6] Academic labor markets are like other labor markets insofar as a rising female share of employment within occupations drives down average pay and devalues work (Levanon, England and Allison).

[7]See Kezar [2012] for examples of models of positive treatment of non-tenure track faculty members.

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